Early Music Series

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A 12th-CENTURY FRENCH TROUBADOUR'S SONG

AB JOI MOU LO VERS E·L COMENS

Edited by Ian Parker

Bernart de Ventadorn
(c.1145–c.1180)

Paris, Bibl.Nat.f.fr.22543, f.57

Milan, Bibl.Ambros.R.71 sup., f.9

Paris, Bibl.Nat.f.fr.844, f.194*

*orig.5th higher

Ab joi mou lo vers_ e·l__ co - mens,

et ab joi re - man___ e fe - nis;

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e sol que bo - na ____ fos ___ la fis,

bos tenh qu'er lo co - men - sa - mens.

Per la bo - na ____ co - men - san - sa

mi ve jois et ___ a - le - gran - sa;

e per so ___ dei ___ la bo - na ___ fi ___ gra - zir ____

car totz bos faihz vei lau - zar ___ al ___ fe - nir. ____

Melody instrument

Voice

Drone

Sustain or repeat at will throughout.

Ab joi mou lo vers ___ e·l co - mens

et ab joi re-man_e fe - nis, e

sol que bo - na fos__ la fis,

bos tenh qu'er lo co - men-sa - mens.

Per la bo - na co-men - san-sa mi ve jois et a - le - gran - sa;

e per so dei la bo - na fi gra - zir

car totz bos faihz vei lau - zar al fe - nir.

II

Si m'a-po - de - ra — jois — e·m vens,

me - ra - vilh' es com o so - - fris

car no dic e non es - brü - is

per cui sui tan gais — e jau - zens.

Mas greu vei - retz fin' a - man - sa — ses pa-or e — ses dop - tan - sa —

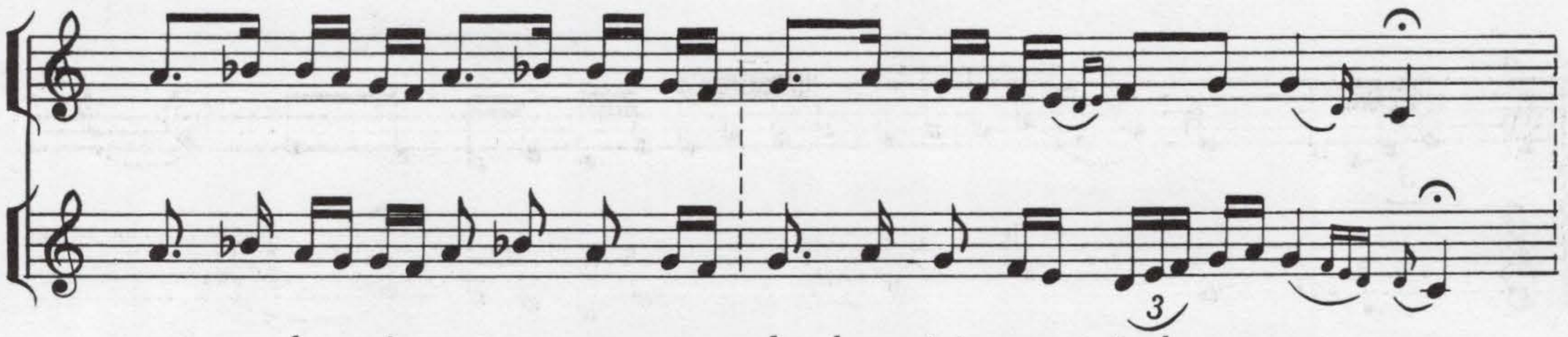
c'a - des tem om vas so c'a - ma, fal - hir,

per qu'eu no·m aus de par-lar en - ar - dir.

VII
Be - la dom-na, ·l vo - stre cors gens e·lh vo-stre belh olh m'an con - quis

e·l doutz es-gartz e lo clar vis

e·l vo - stre bels es - sen - ha - mens


que, can be_m'en pren es-man-sa, de beau-tat no·us trob_ e - gan - sa.

La gen-ser etz c'om posc' el mon chau-zir, ___ o no·i

vei clar dels olhs ab_ queus re-mir.

VIII

Bels Ve-zers, se-nes dop - tan - sa sai que vo-stre pretz e - nan - sa,

que tantz sa-betz de pla - zers far_ e _ dir,

de vos a - mar no·s pot nuls om_ so - frir. _____

IX

Ben dei a - ver a - le - gran - sa, qu'en tal domn' ai

m'es-pe - ran - sa que, qui·n ditz mal, no pot plus lag_ men-tir _____

e qui·m ditz be, no pot

plus bel _____ ver_ dir.

TEXT

I. Ab joi mou lo vers e:l comens
et ab joi reman e fenis,
e sol que bona fos la fis,
bos tenh qu'er lo comensamens.
Per la bona comensansa
mi ve jois et alegransa;
e per so dei la bona fi grazir
car totz bos faihz vei lauzar al fenir.

II. Si m'apodera jois e·m vens,
meravilh' es com o sofris
car no dic e non esbrüis
per cui sui tan gais e jauzens.
Mas greu veiretz fin' amansa
ses paor e ses doptansa
c'ades tem om vas so c'ama, falhir,
per qu'eu no·m aus de parlar enardir.

III. D'una re m'aonda mos sens,
c'anc nulhs om mo joi no·m enquis,
qu'eu volonters no l'en mentis;
car no·m par bos essenhamens
ans es foli' et efansa
qui d'amor a benanansa
ni·n vol so cor ad autre descobrir,
si no l'en pot o valer o servir.

IV. Non es enois ni falhimens
ni vilania, so m'es vis,
mas d'ome can se fai devis
d'autrui amor ni conoissens.
Enoyos, e que·us enansa,
si·m faitz enoi ni pesansa?
Chascus se vol de so mestier formir;
me cofondetz e vos no·n vei jauzir.

V. Ben estai a domn' ardimens
entr' avols gens e mals vezis,
e s'arditz cors no l'afortis,
greu pot esser pros ni valens.
Per qu'eu prec n'aya membransa
la bel' en cui ai fiansa
que no·s chamje per paraulas ni·s vir
qu'enemics, c'ai, fatz d'enveya morir.

VI. Anc sa bela bocha rizens
non cuidei baizan me träis,
car ab un doutz baizar m'aucis
si ab autre no m'es guirens;
c'atretal m'es per semblansa
com de Peäus la lansa
que del seu colp no podi' om garir
si autra vetz no s'en fezes ferir.

VII. Bela domna, l vostre cors gens
e·lh vostre belh olh m'an conquis
e·l doutz esgartz e lo clars vis
e·l vostre bels essenhamens
que, can be m'en pren esmansa,
de beautat no·us trob egansa.
La genser etz c'om posc' el mon chauzir,
o no·i vei clar dels olhs ab que·us remir.

VIII. Bels Vezers, senes doptansa
sai que vostre pretz enansa,
que tantz sabetz de plazers far e dir,
de vos amar no·s pot nuls om sofrir.

IX. Ben dei aver alegransa,
qu'en tal domn' ai m'esperansa,
que, qui·n ditz mal, no pot plus lag mentir
e qui·n ditz be, no pot plus bel ver dir.

TRANSLATION OF TEXT

I. With Joy embarking I begin the verse, and with joy concluding it will end. Only when the ending is good, do I find the beginning good. In a good beginning, joy and happiness come to me, and so I shall welcome the good ending for I see all good deeds applauded at their end.

II. If joy overcomes and conquers me, it is a wonder that I endure it, since I keep silence, not disclosing why I am so gay and happy. But you will hardly see a true lover without reserve and shyness, for a man is always afraid of failing the one he loves; therefore I dare not be bold and speak.

III. My common sense helps me in one thing: no man ever asked about my joy to whom I did not gladly lie about it. For it does not seem to me good manners, rather is it foolish and childish, for one who has good luck in love to be willing to reveal his heart to another, unless it can benefit or serve him.

IV. I hold that there is no vexation, vice or villainy but that of the man who becomes the spy of other people's love. Say, meddler, what good does it do you to cause me worry? Each man wants to manage his own affairs: you ruin me, yet I do not see you happy about it.

V. Courage serves a lady well amid mean people and evil neighbours; and if a stout heart does not give her strength, she is unlikely to be distinguished or admirable. Therefore, I beg the beautiful woman, in whom I have faith, to be mindful of this and not to change or alter because of rumours. Then I can make my enemies die of envy.

VI. I never thought her beautiful, laughing mouth would betray me with a kiss, yet with a sweet kiss she slays me, unless she revives me with another. Her kiss, I think, is like the lance of Peleus, from whose thrust a man could not be cured unless he were wounded by it once again.

VII. Beautiful lady, your delicate form and lovely eyes, your soft glance, radiant face and charming ways have conquered me; for, as I judge it, your equal in beauty cannot be found. You are the most beautiful that one could choose in all the world, or else I am not seeing clearly with the eyes that look upon you.

VIII. Bel Vezer, I know without a doubt that your worth increases, for you are so well-versed in saying and doing pleasing things that no man can keep from loving you.

IX. Indeed, I should have great joy, for I place my hope in such a woman that whoever speaks ill of her cannot tell a more vicious lie, and whoever speaks well of her cannot utter a more beautiful truth.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The text of *Ab joi mou lo vers e·l comens* by the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn (*fl.c.* 1145–*c.* 1180) is found in no less than 27 sources but the melody is confined to three: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS f.fr.844 ("Manuscrit du Roi"); MS f.fr.22543; and Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana R.71 sup. A straightforward transcription of the three readings is given alongside the interpretation which is based on the Ambrosiana version. Single neums have been rendered as ♩ s and ligatures as ♫ s. Plicas are indicated by a stroke through the tail of the note thus, ♪ . In the performing edition this is indicated by an * above the note.

Bernart's polymetric verse consists of six octosyllabic and two decasyllabic lines. There is a clear division into two sections *abba* and *ccdd* for which there is a corresponding division in the music. There is no regular caesura. It is quite clear from Paris, Bibl. Nat., MS f.fr.22543 that the melody is an AAB form but the initial repetition is obscured in the other two sources by considerable variation, including a new cadential formula for the third line. The first section is rather in the nature of an elaborated *recto tono,* a casual procedure which mirrors the fact that the rhyme scheme is not the usual one for an AAB form, viz. *abab* etc. but one normally associated with the free form called *oda continua* by Dante. The edition of the text and translation has been taken from *The Songs of Bernart de Ventadorn* edited by S. G. Nichols *et al.* (University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

There are no performance indications in the MSS themselves, not even rhythmic format, so that all aspects of the performing edition have had to be conjectural. The rhythm is essentially free though metrical patterns do emerge at many points. The poets themselves were intensely interested in metrical variety, so no attempt has been made to impress one 'solution' upon the song. Time values are intended to be interpreted with great freedom and the pauses which occur at most line endings should be taken at the discretion of the performers. Shorter note values are an indication that some lines should follow on quite quickly, if not actually run on. Within the song convention not all lines which can be run on need be, but at times this is clearly advantageous for the meaning (as between lines 1 & 2 of stanza 8). Given the heterophonic nature of the accompanying melody it is not intended that the two voices should synchronize and frequently the same motives have not been aligned. Subdivisions of main notes which are best interpreted as ornaments in the usual sense of the word are printed smaller. As the melodies are repeated for subsequent stanzas they should be varied at the will of the performers and according to the sense of the text. As an example of this stanzas 2 and 8 have been written out in full as well as the two final *tornadas* . Magister Lambertus describes the manner of interpreting the plica as a guttural repercussion of the epiglottis though other theorists such as Adam de St. Victor and Walter Odington are less specific. Jerome of Moravia calls for a rapid reverberation or tremolando and says that it is typical of French singers. Obviously a full tremolando effect can only be made where there is sufficient time. On the shorter notes a partial close of the throat so as to stop the note short of its full value is all that is practicable.

A moderate tempo is suggested for most of the song but a slight quickening in pace will be effective in the simpler and metrically more regular 5th and 6th lines. A suitable instrumentation would be harp for the drone and fiddle for the heterophonic line, but portative organ or hurdy gurdy for drone and rebec or flute for melody would make good alternatives. Any individual part or all parts may be read an octave down.

Ian Parker

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